

SINGAPORE 2019 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Singapore is a parliamentary republic where the People's Action Party (PAP), in power since 1959, overwhelmingly dominated the political scene. The Elections Department declared Halimah Yacob president in 2017; she was the only candidate who qualified for the ballot, which was reserved that year for an ethnic Malay. Observers considered the 2015 general election free and open. The PAP won 83 of 89 parliamentary seats with 70 percent of the vote. The president subsequently reappointed PAP leader Lee Hsien Loong as prime minister.

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs, maintains internal security. The Singapore Armed Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, have trained for deployment alongside the Home Affairs Ministry for certain homeland security operations, including joint deterrence patrols with SPF in instances of heightened terrorism alerts. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces.

Significant human rights issues included: preventive detention by the government under various laws that dispense with regular judicial due process; monitoring private electronic or telephone conversations without a warrant; significant restrictions on the press and internet, including criminal libel laws; significant legal and regulatory limitations on the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; and a law criminalizing sexual activities between men, although this was not enforced.

The government prosecuted officials who committed human rights abuses in previous years. There were no reports of impunity for such abuses in the year to November.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Three Singapore Civil Defense Force (SCDF) officers were imprisoned following their convictions on various charges in relation to the May 2018 death of national serviceman Corporal Kok Yuen Chin, who drowned when he was pushed into a pump well at a fire station during hazing celebrations. Trials of two additional SCDF officers involved in the case were ongoing as of November.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and the government generally respected these prohibitions.

The law mandates imprisonment and mandatory caning for approximately 30 offenses, such as certain cases of rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. Caning is discretionary for convictions on other charges involving the use of force, such as kidnapping or voluntarily causing grievous hurt. Caning also may be used as a punishment for misbehavior while in prison, if first approved by the commissioner of prisons and reviewed by the Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee. Women and girls, men older than 50 years and boys younger than 16, men sentenced to death whose sentences were not commuted, and persons determined medically unfit were exempt from punishment by caning.

In October, Central Narcotics Bureau officer Vengedesh Raj Nainar Nagarajan was charged with three counts of voluntarily causing hurt to extort a confession. He allegedly assaulted a man multiple times to extort a confession about drugs found in the latter's possession. If convicted, Nagarajan could be jailed for up to seven years and fined or caned for each charge.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

There were no reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

Physical Conditions: There were no major concerns about physical conditions or inmate abuse in prisons and detention centers.

Administration: Prisoners may file complaints alleging mistreatment or misconduct to judicial authorities without censorship and may request investigation of credible allegations of problematic conditions. When called upon, the Provost Unit investigates complaints. Criminal charges may be brought against government officials.

The Board of Visiting Justices, consisting of justices of the peace appointed by the minister for home affairs, examines the prison system and has oversight of any investigations undertaken by the Provost Unit. The board conducts regular prison inspections to ensure prisoners' basic welfare and adherence to prison regulations. It may also conduct random visits. All inmates have access to the visiting justices. Authorities documented the results of investigations in a publicly accessible manner.

The Institutional Discipline Advisory Committee renders an opinion to the commissioner of prisons on whether an instance of corporal punishment (which is permitted) was excessive.

The status of the arrestee or convict determined the frequency and type of permitted visits. In general authorities allowed family members and close relatives to visit inmates. Prison authorities must approve visits of nonrelatives.

Independent Monitoring: Authorities allowed members of the press to visit the prisons with prior approval. The Ministry of Home Affairs also appointed a nongovernmental body comprising of citizens to conduct regular prison inspections.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. The law permits arrest without warrant and detention without trial in defined circumstances. Persons detained under these circumstances have a limited right to judicial review of their case. The government generally observed the laws.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

In most instances, the law requires the issuance of an authorized warrant for arrests, but some laws, such as the Internal Security Act (ISA), provide for arrest without a warrant if the government determines the suspect acted in a manner

prejudicial to the security of the country. The law specifies that some offenses, such as robbery or rape, do not require an arrest warrant.

Those arrested according to regular criminal procedure must appear before a magistrate within 48 hours. The accused may not be held for more than 48 hours without a magistrate's approval. Authorities expeditiously charged and brought to trial the majority of those arrested. A functioning bail system existed.

Persons who faced criminal charges were allowed access to counsel at the end of police questioning when investigations were complete or nearly so. Any person accused of a capital crime is eligible to free counsel assigned by the state. The government also funded a Criminal Legal Aid Scheme run by the Law Society that covers additional, but not all, criminal offenses.

Arbitrary Arrest: Some laws, such as the ISA and the Criminal Law (temporary provisions) Act (CLA), have provisions for arrest and detention without a warrant or full judicial due process. ISA cases are subject to review by the courts to provide for compliance with its procedural requirements. Authorities invoked the ISA primarily against persons suspected of posing a security threat and employed the CLA mostly against persons suspected of organized crime activity or drug trafficking.

Pretrial Detention: Pretrial detention was not excessively long. Some individuals, however, were in prolonged detention without trial and with minimal judicial due process under laws that allowed for such detention.

The ISA and the CLA permit preventive detention without trial for the protection of public security, safety, or the maintenance of public order. The ISA authorizes the minister for home affairs, with the consent of the cabinet and with formal endorsement from the president, to order detention without filing charges if the minister determines that a person poses a threat to national security. The initial detention may be for a maximum of two years, which the minister may renew indefinitely. ISA detainees are permitted legal counsel. An independent advisory board consisting of a Supreme Court judge and two other presidential appointees reviews each detainee's case within three months of initial detention and at intervals of no longer than 12 months thereafter. If the advisory board recommends that the detainee be released but the minister disagrees, the president has discretion over the detainee's continued detention.

As of September the government was holding 25 persons under ISA orders of detention (ODs) for alleged involvement in terrorism-related activities.

In September authorities issued ODs for three Indonesian women for terrorism financing activities in support of the Islamic State. Anindia Afiyantari, Retno Hernayani, and Turmini (one name only) were the first foreign domestic workers to be detained under the law, although others have been deported. In October the trio were formally charged with financing terrorism under regular legislation. If convicted, their ODs will be canceled and they will serve jail terms imposed by the court.

In May authorities detained licensed moneychanger Kuthubdeen Haja Najumudeen under the ISA. Authorities said Haja was a follower of Sri Lankan radical preacher Zahran Hashim, the mastermind behind terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka in April.

In addition to detention, the ISA allows for issuance of restriction orders (ROs) that require an individual to seek official approval for a change of address or occupation, overseas travel, or participation in any public organization or activity. RO subjects could be required to report regularly to authorities. As of September, 26 persons were subject to such restrictions. This number included both released detainees and suspected terrorists whom authorities never detained.

In March an RO was issued for food deliveryman Mohamad Fairuz bin Junaidi, who had reportedly considered traveling to Syria to fight for the Islamic State. Authorities said that Fairuz would undergo counseling and rehabilitation.

There is also a category of restriction called suspension direction (SD) that replaces an OD when suspended and may prohibit association with specified groups or individuals and overseas travel without prior written government approval. SDs also include reporting conditions. As of September, two persons were subject to SDs for terrorism-related conduct.

The government used the CLA against serious criminal activities involving narcotics, loan sharks, or criminal organizations. The law was revised in January to specify the criminal activities for which individuals can be detained without trial or placed under police supervision. Under the CLA, which lapses unless parliament renews it every five years, the minister for home affairs may order preventive detention, with the concurrence of the public prosecutor, for an initial period of one year; the president may extend detention for unlimited additional periods of up to one year at a time. A Supreme Court judge chairs a committee

that reviews all cases and conducts hearings at which detainees or their lawyers are present. The country's president considers the committee's recommendations when deciding whether to cancel, confirm or amend the detention, based on the cabinet's advice.

The CLA allows for supervision within the community through means such as curfews, residence limitations, requirements to report regularly to authorities, and limitations on travel.

The drug laws permit detention without trial in an approved institution for the purpose of the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts. If a suspected drug abuser tests positive for an illegal drug or displays signs of drug withdrawal, the director of the Central Narcotics Bureau may commit the person to a drug rehabilitation center for a six-month period, which a review committee of the institution may extend for a maximum of three years. By law the bureau director may order treatment as long as six months of a person determined by blood test or medical examination to be an abuser of intoxicating substances.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: The constitution provides the right of habeas corpus in regular criminal law.

Under the CLA, the minister for home affairs' decision on a suspect's criminal guilt is final and not subject to appeal, as is the minister's subsequent decision on whether detention is necessary for reasons of public safety, peace and good order. The courts can review the minister's decision, but only based on the tests of illegality, irrationality, and procedural impropriety.

Persons detained under the CLA and remanded for trial may apply to the courts for a writ of habeas corpus. Persons detained without trial under the CLA may challenge the substantive basis for their detention only to the CLA advisory committee, which is chaired by a Supreme Court judge.

Under the ISA detainees may challenge their detention in the judicial system only by seeking judicial review of whether their detention complied with procedural requirements of the ISA; they have no right to challenge the substantive basis for their detention through the courts. The ISA specifically excludes recourse to the normal judicial system for review of a detention order made under its authority.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence. Some observers expressed concern about undue government influence in the judicial system. Laws limiting judicial review, moreover, permitted restrictions on individuals' constitutional rights.

The ISA and CLA explicitly preclude normal judicial due process and empower the government to limit, on vaguely defined national security grounds, other fundamental liberties provided for in the constitution.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for a fair and public trial, except for persons detained under the ISA, CLA, and similar legislation. The judiciary generally enforced this right when applicable. Some commentators observed a small number of exceptions in cases involving direct challenges to the government or the ruling party. The judicial system generally provided an efficient judicial process.

In most circumstances the criminal procedure code requires that when a defendant is first charged in court, the charges must be framed, read and explained to the defendant. After the charges are filed in court, the accused may seek advice of counsel before deciding whether to plead guilty or request a trial. At a pretrial hearing no earlier than eight weeks after criminal charges have been made, a judge determines whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial and sets a court date.

Criminal defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence in most cases. Cases involving narcotics are an exception; the law stipulates that a person who possessed narcotics shall be assumed to be aware of the substance and places the burden on the defendant to prove otherwise. The law also stipulates that if the amount of the narcotic is above set limits, the defendant must prove he or she did not have the drug for trafficking purposes.

Trials are public and heard by a judge; there are no jury trials. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials and to be represented by an attorney. The Law Society administered a legal aid plan for persons facing criminal charges who could not afford an attorney. The state did so for anyone facing a capital charge. Defense lawyers generally had sufficient time and facilities to prepare an adequate defense. Criminal defendants who do not speak or understand English, or who have limited proficiency, are provided with translation services at no cost.

Defendants have the right to question prosecution witnesses and to provide witnesses and evidence on their own behalf.

Defendants enjoy the right of appeal, which must be filed within 14 days in most cases. The criminal procedure code provides for an automatic appeal process for all death sentence cases. The courts may offer nonviolent offenders the option of probation or paying a fine in lieu of incarceration. Those sentenced to death may ask for resentencing under certain circumstances, and judges may impose life imprisonment instead.

Persons detained under the ISA or CLA are not entitled to a public trial. Proceedings of the ISA and CLA advisory boards are not public.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Access to the courts is open, and citizens and residents have the right to sue for infringement of human rights.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution does not address privacy rights; statutory or common law provide remedies for infringement of some aspects of privacy rights. The government generally respected the physical privacy of homes and families. Normally, police must have a warrant issued by a court to conduct a search but may search a person, home, or property without a warrant if they decide that such a search is necessary to preserve evidence or permissible according to discretionary powers of the ISA, CLA, and other laws.

Law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Department and the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, had extensive networks for gathering information and conducting surveillance and highly sophisticated capabilities to monitor telephone, email, text messaging, or other digital communications intended to remain private. No court warrants are required for such operations.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

The constitution provides for freedom of expression but allows parliament to impose such restrictions on freedom of speech as it “considers necessary or expedient in the interest of the security of the country or any part thereof, friendly relations with other countries, public order or morality and restrictions designed to protect the privileges of Parliament or to provide against contempt of court, defamation or incitement to any offence.”

Freedom of Expression: The government significantly restricted any public statements that it contended would undermine social or religious harmony, or that did not safeguard national or public interest. Government pressure to conform resulted in self-censorship among some journalists and users of the internet.

In August police issued warnings to YouTube star Preeti Nair and her brother, rapper Subhas Nair, for promoting racial disharmony through a rap video in which they criticized the ethnic Chinese community. The siblings’ video mocked a recent “Brownface” advertisement in which an ethnic Chinese actor played four different characters, including an Indian man with artificially darkened skin, and a Malay Muslim woman wearing a hijab. Four ministers criticized the siblings’ “offensive” video, which included vulgarities, and the government issued a takedown notice for it to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

In April activist Jolovan Wham and opposition politician John Tan Liang Joo, of the Singapore Democratic Party, were each fined S\$5,000 (\$3,630) plus legal costs for contempt of court. They were convicted in October 2018 after Wham posted on Facebook that “Malaysia’s judges are more independent than Singapore’s for cases with political implications” and, when Wham was prosecuted, Tan commented that the case “only confirms that what he said is true.”

In April the Court of Appeal ruled that papers for contempt of court proceedings were properly served on Li Shengwu, a nephew of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in 2017. Li had posted private Facebook comments in 2017 criticizing the “litigious” nature of the government and the “pliant court system.” The case was ongoing as of November. While media and internet users have shared the facts of the case, many have been circumspect in commenting further because publishing material that prejudices a pending issue in court proceedings may constitute contempt of court.

The law gives the minister for home affairs discretion to authorize special police powers if a “serious incident” such as a terrorist attack is occurring or there is a threat that it could. These powers allow the commissioner of police to prohibit anyone from taking or transmitting photographs or videos in a defined area, or from making text or audio messages about police operations. A breach of the order may lead to imprisonment for up to two years, a fine of up to S\$20,000 (\$14,500), or both. Some civil society groups expressed concern that authorities could use the law to stop activists documenting the abuse of police powers, such as in the instance that authorities used force to break up a large but peaceful demonstration.

The law prohibits the public display of any foreign national emblems, including flags or symbols of political organizations or leaders. The law restricts the use of the coat of arms, flag, and national anthem.

The government-approved Speakers’ Corner was the only outdoor venue where citizens could give public speeches without a Public Entertainment License. Speakers’ Corner may be used for exhibitions, performances, assemblies and processions, and citizens do not need a police permit to hold these events. All event organizers must, however, preregister online with the National Parks Board and must provide the topic of their event. Regulations state that the event should not be religious in nature or cause feelings of enmity, ill will, or hostility between different racial or religious groups. The commissioner of parks and recreation has the right to cancel or disallow any event or activity that he or she believes may endanger, cause discomfort to, or inconvenience other park users or the general public.

Citizens need a permit to speak at indoor public gatherings outside of the hearing or view of nonparticipants if the topic refers to race or religion. Indoor, private events are not subject to the same restrictions. Organizers of private events, however, must prevent inadvertent access by uninvited guests, or they could be cited for noncompliance with the rules regarding public gatherings.

Press and Media, Including Online Media: According to the ISA, the government may restrict or place conditions on publications that incite violence, counsel disobedience to the law, have the potential to arouse tensions in the country’s diverse population, or threaten national interests, national security, or public order.

Government leaders openly urged news media to support its goals and help maintain social and religious harmony. The government enforced strict defamation and press laws, including in what it considered personal attacks on officials,

resulting in journalists and editors moderating or limiting what was published. The government sued journalists or online bloggers for defamation or for stories that authorities believed undermined racial and religious harmony.

There were no legal bans on owning or operating private press outlets, although in practice government managerial and financial control strongly influenced all print and some electronic media. Two companies, Singapore Press Holdings Limited (SPH) and MediaCorp, owned all general circulation newspapers in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. SPH is a publicly listed company with close ties to the government, which must approve (and may remove) the holders of management shares, who appoint or dismiss SPH management. The government investment company Temasek Holdings wholly owned MediaCorp. As a result, coverage of domestic events and reporting of sensitive foreign relations topics usually closely reflected official government policies and views.

Government-linked companies and organizations operated all domestic broadcast television channels and almost all radio stations. Only one radio station, the BBC's World Service, was completely independent of the government. Residents could receive some Malaysian and Indonesian television and radio programming, but with a few exceptions authorities prohibited satellite dishes. Cable television was widespread, and subscribers had access to numerous foreign television shows and a wide array of international news and entertainment channels. The government did not censor international news channels but did censor entertainment programs to remove or edit representations of intimate gay and lesbian relationships. Residents routinely accessed uncensored international radio and television content via the internet.

The government may limit broadcasts or the circulation of publications by "gazetting" (listing) them under the Broadcasting Act and may ban the circulation of domestic and foreign publications. The law empowers the minister for communications and information to gazette or place formal restrictions on any foreign broadcaster deemed to be engaging in domestic politics.

The government may require a gazetted broadcaster to obtain express permission from the minister to continue broadcasting in the country. The government may impose restrictions on the number of households receiving a broadcaster's programming and may fine a broadcaster up to S\$100,000 (\$72,500) for failing to comply.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The Info-communications Media Development Authority (IMDA) under the Ministry of Communications and Information regulates broadcast, print, and other media, including movies, video materials, computer games, and music. Most banned publications were sexually oriented materials but also included some religious and political publications. The IMDA develops censorship standards including age appropriate classification of media content with the help of various citizen advisory panels. The law allows the banning, seizure, censorship, or restriction of written, visual, or musical materials if authorities determine that such materials threaten the stability of the state, contravene moral norms, are pornographic, show excessive or gratuitous sex and violence, glamorize or promote drug use, or incite racial, religious, or linguistic animosities. The law gives IMDA officers power to enter and search premises and seize evidence without a warrant for “serious offenses,” such as those involving films prohibited on public interest grounds or the unlicensed public exhibition of a film. The IMDA has the power to sanction broadcasters for transmitting what it believed to be inappropriate content. All content shown between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. must be suitable for viewers of all ages.

Libel/Slander Laws: Defamation is a criminal offense, and conviction on criminal defamation charges may result in a maximum prison sentence of two years, a fine, or both. Critics charged that government leaders used defamation lawsuits or threats of such actions to discourage public criticism, coerce the press, and intimidate opposition politicians.

In September, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong sued Terry Xu, editor of the sociopolitical website *The Online Citizen*, for defamation following Xu’s refusal to take down and apologize for an article about a dispute between Lee and his two siblings. In a separate case, Xu was charged in December 2018 for criminal defamation after he published a reader’s letter in which the author accused the PAP leadership of “corruption at the highest echelons.” The letter’s author, Daniel De Costa, was also charged with criminal defamation. De Costa lodged a constitutional challenge against the charge, with hearings scheduled for November.

Internet Freedom

The law permits government monitoring of internet use, and the government closely monitored internet activities, such as social media posts, blogs, and podcasts. The IMDA can direct service providers to block access to websites that, in the government’s view, undermine public security, national defense, racial and

religious harmony, or public morals. Political and religious websites must register with the IMDA.

Individuals and groups could express their views via the internet, including by email. The government, however, subjected all internet content to similar rules and standards as traditional media, as defined by the IMDA's Internet Code of Practice. Internet service providers are required to ensure that content complies with the code. The IMDA also regulates internet material by licensing the internet service providers through which local users are required to route their internet connections. The IMDA investigates content that is potentially in breach of the code when it receives complaints from members of the public.

In October the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) went into effect. It requires online platforms to publish corrections or remove online information that government ministers consider factually false or misleading, and which it deems likely to be prejudicial to the country, diminish public confidence in the government, incite feelings of ill will between people, or influence an election. POFMA is not supposed to apply to opinions, criticisms, satire, or parody. Individuals in breach of the law may be fined up to S\$50,000 (\$36,300) and imprisoned for up to five years, with penalties doubled if the individual used bots. A platform that fails to remove false content may be fined up to S\$ one million (\$725,000) and, in the case of a continuing offense, a maximum fine of S\$100,000 (\$72,500) for each additional day the offense continues after conviction.

The Online News Licensing Scheme requires more heavily visited internet sites focused on news about the country to obtain a license. The license requires these sites to submit a bond of S\$50,000 (\$36,300) and to adhere to additional requirements to remove prohibited content within 24 hours of notification from the IMDA. Many citizens viewed this regulation as a way to censor online critics of the government. The IMDA stated there was a need to regulate commercial news sites and promote conformity with other forms of media such as print and television. All 11 major news sites operate with IMDA licenses; the most recent addition was the independent website *TOC*, which joined two other non-state-linked publications that are licensed.

Smaller news sites that cover political issues are required to register under the Broadcasting Act Class License to ensure that registrants do not receive foreign funding.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

Public institutions of higher education and political research had limited autonomy. Although faculty members were not technically government employees, they were potentially subject to government influence. Academics spoke, published widely, and engaged in debate on social and political problems, although public comment outside the classroom or in academic publications that ventured into prohibited areas could result in sanctions. Publications by local academics and members of research institutions rarely deviated substantially from government views.

In September, Yale-NUS College, the country's only liberal arts college, canceled a course entitled "Dialogue and Dissent in Singapore" two weeks before its start date. University administrators said that the program risked exposing students to legal liabilities, did not critically engage with the range of perspectives needed to examine the issues, and that some of the program's speakers could advance partisan political interests. The president of Yale University said on September 29 that the cancellation decision was made "internally and without government interference"; however, the incident sparked debate on the parameters of academic freedom.

The law authorizes the minister of communications and information to ban any film, whether political or not, that in his opinion is "contrary to the public interest." The law does not apply to any film sponsored by the government and allows the minister to exempt any film from the act.

Certain films barred from general release may be allowed limited showings, either censored or uncensored.

In March, IMDA canceled a small concert by Swedish satanist black metal band *Watain*. IMDA initially agreed to the band performing for an age 18 and older audience and with specific references, songs, and acts removed from the performance, but retracted its permission on the day of the concert after the Ministry of Home Affairs raised security concerns about the group. Minister for Home Affairs K. Shanmugam said that allowing the band to play would be against "public order interest and affect our religious and social harmony."

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

Although the constitution provides citizens the right to peaceful assembly, parliament imposed restrictions in the interest of security, public order, or morality. Public assemblies, including political meetings and rallies, require police permission. It is a criminal offense to organize or participate in a public assembly without a police permit, and those convicted may be fined up to S\$3,000 (\$2,180). Repeat offenders may be fined up to S\$5,000 (\$3,630).

By law a public assembly may include events staged by a single person. Citizens do not need permits for indoor speaking events, unless they touch on “sensitive topics” such as race or religion, or for qualifying events held at Speakers’ Corner. The Commissioner of Police may decline to authorize any public assembly or procession that could be directed towards a political end and be organized by, or involve the participation of, a foreign entity or citizen. Police may also order a person to “move on” from a certain area and not return to the designated spot for 24 hours.

In September police opened an investigation into Nafiz Kamarudin and his wife for illegal public assembly. Earlier that month the pair wore T-shirts with antideath penalty slogans to the Yellow Ribbon Prison Run, which is held to support prisoner rehabilitation. Race organizers said that Nafiz could not use the event to campaign against existing laws, and police said citizens should express their views at Speakers’ Corner.

As of November several illegal assembly cases were pending against activist Jolovan Wham. Wham said he would appeal the High Court’s October dismissal of his appeal against a conviction in January on a charge of organizing a public assembly without a permit in 2016. Wham was sentenced to either a S\$3,200 (\$2,320) fine or 16 days’ imprisonment for the illegal assembly and for refusing to sign a statement he gave to police about the case. The indoor event was entitled, “Civil Disobedience and Social Movements,” and included a Skype address by Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong.

Some civil society groups and members of parliament expressed concern that the Public Order and Safety (Special Powers) Act (see section 2.a.) conflates peaceful protests and terrorist violence. The law’s illustrations of “large-scale public disorder” include a peaceful sit-down demonstration that attracts a large group of sympathizers and which after a week starts to impede the flow of traffic and interfere with local business activities.

The government closely monitored political gatherings regardless of the number of persons present.

Spontaneous public gatherings or demonstrations were virtually unknown.

Freedom of Association

Most associations, societies, clubs, religious groups, and other organizations with more than 10 members are required to register with the government. The government could deny registration to or dissolve groups it believed were formed for unlawful purposes or for purposes prejudicial to public peace, welfare, or public order. The majority of applications in recent years were approved. The government has absolute discretion in applying criteria to register or dissolve societies.

The government prohibits organized political activities except by groups registered as political parties or political associations. These may not receive foreign donations but may receive funds from citizens and locally controlled entities. The ruling PAP was able to use nonpolitical organizations, such as residential committees and neighborhood groups, for political purposes far more extensively than could opposition parties. Due to laws regulating the formation of publicly active organizations, there were few nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) apart from nonpolitical organizations, such as religious or environmental groups.

In October parliament passed legislation to amend the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, although implementation was pending as of November. Senior leadership and a majority of board members of any religious group will need to be citizens or permanent residents of the country and, with some exemptions, foreign donations and foreign affiliations must be declared to authorities. Authorities will be able to restrict or prohibit foreign donations and foreigners in leadership roles.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, although it limited them in certain circumstances.

In-country Movement: The ISA permits authorities to restrict a person's movement, and they did so in the case of some former ISA detainees. Several dozen suspected terrorists were subject to such restrictions.

Foreign Travel: The government may refuse to issue a passport; in practice this was done primarily on security grounds.

Persons with national service reserve obligations (male citizens and permanent residents between ages 18 and 40 (for enlisted men) or 50 (for officers)) are required to advise the Ministry of Defense of plans to travel abroad. Men and boys age 13 and older who have not completed national service obligations are required to obtain exit permits for international travel if they intend to be away for three months or more.

In June a permanent resident, Thirumal Pavithran (an Indian national), was jailed for 10 weeks after he remained outside the country for more than five years after his exit permit expired. Those convicted of remaining outside the country without a valid exit permit can be jailed for up to three years and fined up to S\$10,000 (\$7,250) for each charge.

The law allows the government to deprive naturalized citizens of citizenship if they have resided outside of the country for more than five consecutive years or have engaged in activities deemed harmful to public safety and order.

e. Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

Access to Asylum: The law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status. The government may, on a case-by-case basis, cooperate with organizations such as UN High Commissioner for Refugees to repatriate or send refugees to a third country.

g. Stateless Persons

As of 2018 there were 1,303 stateless persons living in the country. Many were reportedly born in the country before independence but did not or could not meet requirements for citizenship then in force. Others were permanent residents who lost their foreign citizenship, or were children born to foreign nationals who are not recognized as citizens in their home countries. Stateless persons may apply for citizenship.

Approximately 80 percent of stateless persons have obtained permanent residency, but those who have not may not buy or rent real estate, are not entitled to government health or education subsidies, and may have difficulty securing employment.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in open and free periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. In five decades of continuous rule, however, the PAP has employed a variety of measures that effectively limited the ability of the opposition to mount a serious challenge to its hold on power. In recent years, the opposition won additional seats, although it still held a small fraction of seats in parliament.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: The law provides for the popular election of the president to a six-year term from among candidates approved by two committees selected by the government. The constitution also requires multiracial representation in the presidency. The office of the president is reserved for a member of a specific racial community (Chinese, Malay, or Indian and other minority communities) if no person belonging to that community had held the office of the president for any of the last five terms of office. The 2017 presidential election was thus restricted to eligible Malay candidates. In 2017 former speaker of parliament Halimah Yacob became president without a vote because she was the only candidate; two other applicants were ruled ineligible according to criteria applicable to private sector candidates.

The 2015 parliamentary general election was free and open. There were eight opposition parties, and all seats were contested for the first time since independence. The ruling party won 69.9 percent of the popular vote, capturing 83 of 89 seats in parliament. The opposition Workers' Party won the same six seats it

had carried in 2011. The general elections operate according to a first-past-the-post system. A constitutional provision mandates at least nine opposition members in parliament; there were three nonconstituency members from the Workers' Party in the parliament, chosen from the highest finishing runners-up in the general election. A constitutional amendment that took effect in January increases the number of opposition members to 12 in the next general election, which must be held by April 2021.

Political Parties and Political Participation: The opposition criticized the PAP for its abuse of incumbency to restrict opposition parties. The PAP maintained its political dominance in part by circumscribing political discourse and action. For example, government-appointed and predominantly publicly funded Community Development Councils, which provide welfare and other services, strengthened the PAP's position. The PAP also had an extensive grassroots system and a carefully selected, highly disciplined membership. The constitutional requirement that members of parliament resign if expelled from their party helped promote backbencher discipline.

The PAP controlled key positions in and out of government, influenced the press, and benefited from weak opposition parties. While the PAP's methods were consistent with the law and the prerogatives of parliamentary government in the country, the overall effect was to perpetuate PAP power.

Although political parties were legally free to organize, authorities imposed strict regulations on their constitutions, fundraising, and accountability, including a ban on receiving foreign donations and a requirement to report donations. There were 32 registered political parties, 12 of which were active.

Participation of Women and Minorities: No law limits the participation of women and minorities in the political process, and they did participate. Three of the 19 members of cabinet were women, and the country's president was a minority race woman. Presidential elections may be reserved for certain racial communities. There are no other restrictions in law or practice against voting or political participation by minorities; they were well represented throughout the government, except in some sensitive national security positions.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government implemented these laws effectively.

Corruption: Media reported one new case of serious public sector corruption during the year. In October, Immigration and Checkpoints Authority customer service officer Lucy Teo was charged with receiving bribes from a Malaysian national who applied to become a permanent resident. Teo was charged with two counts of engaging in a conspiracy to obtain corruptly S\$1,500 (\$1,090) from the Malaysian. Two other individuals, including the Malaysian, were also charged with corruption-related offenses.

In September the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau reported that of the 112 persons prosecuted for corruption in court in 2018, five were public sector employees. In one case, former general manager of the Ang Mo Kio town council Victor Wong Chee Meng, who was charged in 2018 with 55 counts of corruption, pleaded guilty in March to receiving S\$86,000 (\$62,400) in inducements from the directors of two building and repair companies, and was sentenced to 27 months' imprisonment.

Financial Disclosure: The law requires civil servants to declare their investments, properties, and indebtedness to their respective permanent secretaries. According to the code of conduct for ministers, ministers make financial disclosures to the prime minister. Declarations are not made public. If evidence surfaces that a declaration is fraudulent, administrative "disciplinary measures" may be imposed. The salaries of ministers and senior officials were public information.

Section 5. Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction and these organizations investigated and published their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views. NGOs were subject to registration according to the Societies Act or the Companies Act.

Some international human rights NGOs criticized the government's policies in areas such as capital punishment, migrant workers' rights, freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and protection of the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. They charged that the government generally ignored such criticisms or published rebuttals.

Section 6. Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

Parliament passed the Criminal Law Reform Act in May. The law has been formally gazetted (published), but implementation was pending as of December. Under the new law, individuals convicted under the Penal Code for any offenses committed against vulnerable victims--children below the age of 14, persons with mental or physical disabilities, and domestic workers--will be liable to up to twice the maximum penalty. The law will abolish marital immunity for rape, expand the definition of rape to make it gender neutral, increase the penalties for offenses committed against unmarried partners, and introduce new criminal offenses for technology-related crimes such as voyeurism. These and other provisions of the new law will significantly change many of the legal provisions reported below.

The Protection from Harassment (Amendment) Act became law in June--implementation was pending as of December--makes doxing an offense and improves judicial procedures for victims of online harassment.

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: Under the law rape is a crime, with maximum penalties of 20 years' imprisonment and the possibility of caning. By law only a man can commit rape. A man cannot legally be a victim of rape but may be the victim of unlawful sexual penetration, which carries the same penalties as rape. Spousal rape is not specified as a crime in most situations, but husbands who force their wives to have intercourse may be prosecuted for other offenses, such as assault. Spousal rape is a criminal offense when the couple is separated, subject to an interim divorce order that has not become final, or subject to a written separation agreement, as well as when a court has issued a protection order against the husband. Domestic violence is a crime. Victims may obtain court orders restraining the respondent and barring the spouse or former spouse from the home until the court is satisfied the spouse has ceased aggressive behavior. The government enforced the laws on rape and domestic violence.

Identity protection orders are mandatory from the time a police report of a sexual crime or child abuse is lodged. Victims of sexual crimes may video-record their testimony instead of having to recount it in person. Victims may testify in closed-door hearings, with physical screens to shield them from the accused person. Lawyers may not ask questions about a victim's sexual history, unless the court grants them permission to do so.

Several voluntary welfare organizations that assisted abused women noted that gender-based violence was underreported but the number of reported incidents was increasing, which they said was the result of advocacy campaigns to address social stigma.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Type I (a) (as classified by the World Health Organization) FGM/C was practiced among a small portion of the Muslim population. Referred to locally as “ceremonial” female circumcision, it was undertaken as a standardized procedure by designated doctors under the supervision of the Muslim Healthcare Professionals Association. There was no legislation banning FGM/C.

Sexual Harassment: Harassment is a crime and the law includes harassment within and outside the workplace, cyberbullying, and bullying of children. The law also prescribes mandatory caning and minimum of two years’ imprisonment on conviction on any charge of “outraging modesty” that causes the victim to fear death or injury. The law also subjects persons convicted of using threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behavior to maximum fines of S\$5,000 (\$3,630). It also provides a range of self-help measures, civil remedies, and enhanced criminal sanctions to protect against harassment. Additionally, stalking is an offense punishable with a maximum fine of S\$5,000 (\$3,630), imprisonment for up to 12 months, or both.

According to police statistics, outrage of modesty incidents continued to increase, with the number increasing 5 percent in the first six months of the year compared with the same period in 2018 (from 797 to 837 cases). The women’s rights advocacy group AWARE reported that government campaigns encouraging women to report sexual molestation led to the increase. Media gave significant coverage to sexual harassment convictions throughout the year, and several members of parliament urged the government to address sexual harassment in the workplace more actively.

In April, National University of Singapore student Monica Baey drew national attention to sexual harassment on campuses when she expressed unhappiness about the punishment a voyeur received for filming her in a shower at a university hostel without her consent. The police had issued a warning to the student not to reoffend, and the university suspended him for one term. The university subsequently apologized for its handling of the case and undertook to reform its policy towards sexual offenders. In May, Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung issued a statement to parliament about the 56 cases of sexual misconduct at local

universities from 2015 to 2017 that were reported to police and said his ministry would review disciplinary frameworks in all publicly funded higher education institutions.

Coercion in Population Control: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization.

Discrimination: Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, including civil liberties, employment, commercial activity, and education. Women were well represented in many professions (see section 7.d.).

No laws mandate nondiscrimination in hiring based on gender; prohibit employers from asking questions about a prospective employee's family status during a job interview; require flexible or part-time work schedules for employees with minor children; or establish public provision of childcare.

Polygyny is permitted for Muslim men but is limited and strictly regulated by the Registry of Muslim Marriages, which oversees Muslim marriages and other family law matters. Polygynous marriages constituted 0.2 percent of Muslim marriages.

Children

Birth Registration: Citizenship derives from one's parents. The law requires that all births be registered within 14 days.

Child Abuse: The law criminalizes mistreatment of children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The government enforced the law and provided support services for child abuse victims.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development investigated 1,163 child abuse cases in 2018, 30 percent more than in 2017. Commentators believe that the number of child abuse cases reported annually is growing due to improved detection efforts, an increase in the availability of support services, and government publicity campaigns that encourage reporting.

Early and Forced Marriage: The law characterizes unmarried persons younger than age 21 as minors and persons younger than 14 as children. Individuals younger than 21 who wish to marry must obtain parental consent, and the couple must attend a mandatory marriage preparation program. Individuals younger than 18 also require a special license from the Ministry of Social and Family

Development to wed or, if they are marrying under Muslim law, they require permission from the *kadi* (a Muslim judge appointed by the president), who will grant permission only under special conditions.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law criminalizes human trafficking, including child sex trafficking, and authorities enforced the law.

The age of consent for noncommercial sex is 16 years. Sexual intercourse with a person younger than 16 is punishable by a maximum of 10 years in prison, a fine, or both, and if the victim is 14 or younger punishable by as long as 20 years in prison and a fine or caning.

Authorities may detain (but generally do not prosecute) persons younger than 18 whom they believe to be engaged in prostitution. They prosecute those who organize or profit from prostitution, bring women or girls to the country for prostitution, or coerce or deceive women or girls into prostitution. The law is ambiguous regarding employment of persons ages 16 to 18 in the production of pornography.

International Child Abductions: The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State's *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

Although estimates varied widely, the government estimated there were approximately 2,500 members in the Jewish community. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Persons with Disabilities

There is no comprehensive legislation addressing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in education or employment.

The Ministry of Social and Family Development is responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and coordinates implementation of the government's 2017-2021 policy plan for programs and services in the disability sector, which focuses on greater inclusiveness.

The government maintained a comprehensive code on barrier-free accessibility and standards for facilities for persons with physical disabilities in all new buildings, and mandated the progressive upgrading of older structures. SG Enable, established by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, administered several assistance schemes for persons with disabilities, and provided a job training and placement program for them. The Ministry for Manpower reported in September that the number of persons with disabilities in the workforce is increasing, as more employers access government support programs.

The Disabled People's Association, an advocacy group, reported private discrimination against persons with disabilities who were seeking employment.

The country provided a high level of educational support for children and minors with disabilities from preschool to university. Starting in January children with moderate to severe educational needs were required to participate in compulsory education until they reached the age of 15. Elementary and secondary levels both included mainstreaming programs and separate education schools. All primary schools and the majority of secondary schools had specialist support for students with mild disabilities. Mainstreaming programs catered primarily to children with physical disabilities. Separate education schools, which focused on children who required more intensive and specialized assistance, were operated by social service organizations and involved a means-tested payment of fees. The Special Educational Needs Support Offices, established in all publicly funded tertiary education institutions including universities, provided support for students. Informal provisions permitted university matriculation for those with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities through assistive technology devices and services such as note taking.

Electoral law allows voters who are unable to vote in the manner described by law to receive assistance from election officials to mark and cast their ballots. In the 2015 general election, voters with visual disabilities could cast their vote independently with stencils. The Disabled People's Association recommended that persons with disabilities be permitted to choose who would assist them to mark and cast their ballots.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic Malays constituted approximately 15 percent of the population. The constitution recognizes them as the indigenous inhabitants of the country and charges the government to support and promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests. The government took steps to encourage educational achievement among Malay students and upgrading of skills among Malay workers, including through subsidies for tertiary education fees for poorer Malays. Malay educational performance has improved, although ethnic Malays have not yet reached the educational or socioeconomic levels achieved by the ethnic Chinese majority, the ethnic Indian minority, or the Eurasian community. Malays remained underrepresented at senior corporate levels and, some asserted, in certain sectors of the government and the military. This reflected their historically lower educational and economic levels, but some argued it also was the result of employment discrimination.

The Presidential Council on Minority Rights examines all pending bills to ensure they do not disadvantage any particular group. It also reports to the government on matters that affect any racial or religious community.

Government policy designed to facilitate interethnic harmony and prevent the formation of racial enclaves enforced ethnic ratios, applicable for all ethnic groups, to all forms of public housing.

Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Section 377A of the penal code criminalizes male-to-male sexual relations, subject to up to two years' imprisonment. Authorities have not enforced this since 2010 and have stated since then that they do not intend to do so. The prime minister and the minister for home affairs and law have said they personally are not opposed to male-to-male sexual relations, and in June, Prime Minister Lee told participants at an international conference that persons of all sexual orientations are welcome to work in the country, although section 377A will remain part of the country's law "for some time." There were no indications the provision was used intentionally to intimidate or coerce. Its existence, however, intimidates some gay men, particularly those who are victims of sexual assault but who will not report it to the police for fear of being charged with violating Section 377A.

A constitutional challenge to section 377A which combines three separate cases was making its way through the courts as of November. In September 2018 disc jockey Johnson Ong filed a constitutional challenge based on the argument that section 377A violates the right to “life and personal liberty” and the right to equality. His challenge also argued that sexual orientation “is unchangeable or suppressible at unacceptable personal cost.” Ong’s case has been merged with a constitutional challenge filed in November 2018 by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex (LGBTI) advocate Choong Chee Hong. An additional constitutional challenge was filed in September by a retired doctor, Tan Seng Kee, who in 2009 organized the country’s first Pink Dot rally in support of LGBTI rights.

No laws explicitly protect the LGBTI community from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Moreover, since single persons are prevented from purchasing government housing reserved for married couples until age 35 and same-sex marriage is not permitted, LGBTI persons were unable to receive certain government services and benefits available to other citizens before reaching 35.

In December 2018 the High Court ruled that a gay father could adopt his biological son (born via surrogacy), because the child’s welfare took precedence over the government’s policy against the formation of same-sex family units. The minister for social and family development expressed concern and said that his ministry would review adoption laws.

LGBTI persons experience discrimination in the military, which classifies individuals by sexual orientation and evaluates them on a scale of “effeminacy” to determine fitness for combat training and other assignments. Openly gay servicemen faced threats and harassment from their peers and were often ostracized.

Individuals were prohibited from updating their gender on official documents unless they underwent sex reassignment surgery.

Media censorship perpetuated negative stereotypes of LGBTI individuals by restricting portrayals of LGBTI life. The IMDA censored films and television shows with LGBTI themes. According to the IMDA website, authorities allow the broadcast of LGBTI themes on television “as long as the presentation does not justify, promote, or glamorize such a lifestyle” (see section 2.a.).

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

There is no legislation barring employers from discriminating against job applicants based on their HIV status. The government's new guidelines for employers state that employees who are dismissed based on their medical status have grounds for wrongful dismissal claims against their employers. In February the Ministry of Manpower said that the law protects employees from wrongful dismissal, "including on the grounds of HIV." Many persons living with HIV are, however, afraid to disclose their HIV status during the job application process and, during employment, fear dismissal if they are discovered to have made a false declaration.

Some persons with HIV/AIDS claimed that they were socially marginalized and faced employment discrimination or possible termination if they revealed their HIV/AIDS status; Action for Aids said it received eight complaints about wrongful dismissal in 2018. Some HIV-positive persons seek diagnosis and treatment outside the country.

The government discouraged discrimination, supported initiatives that countered misperceptions about HIV/AIDS, and publicly praised employers that welcomed workers with HIV/AIDS. HIV-positive foreigners, however, are barred from obtaining work permits, student visas, or immigrant visas.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for the right of most workers to form and join trade unions. Workers have the legal right to strike and to bargain collectively. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination.

Parliament may impose restrictions on the right of association based on security, public order, or morality grounds. The Ministry of Manpower also has broad powers to refuse to register a union or to cancel a union's registration. Laws and regulations restrict freedom of association by requiring any group of 10 or more persons to register with the government. The law also restricts the right of uniformed personnel and government employees to organize, although the president may grant exemptions. Foreigners and those with criminal convictions generally may not hold union office or become employees of unions, but the ministry may grant exemptions.

The law requires more than 50 percent of affected unionized workers to vote in favor of a strike by secret ballot, as opposed to 51 percent of those participating in the vote. Workers in “essential services” are required to give 14 days’ notice to an employer before striking, and there is a prohibition on strikes by workers in the water, gas, and electricity sectors.

Unions were unable to carry out their work without interference from the government or political parties. The law limits how unions may spend their funds, prohibiting, for example, payments to political parties or the use of funds for political purposes, and restricts the right of trade unions to elect their officers and choose their employees.

Almost all unions were affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), an umbrella organization with a close relationship with the government and the ruling PAP. The NTUC secretary-general was a cabinet minister and four PAP members of parliament were in NTUC leadership positions. NTUC policy prohibited union members who supported opposition parties from holding office in its affiliated unions.

Collective bargaining was a routine part of labor-management relations in all sectors. Because nearly all unions were its affiliates, the NTUC had almost exclusive authority to exercise collective bargaining power on behalf of employees. Union members may not reject collective agreements negotiated between their union representatives and an employer. Although transfers and layoffs are excluded from the scope of collective bargaining, employers consulted with unions on both issues.

Foreign workers constituted approximately 15 percent of union members. Labor NGOs also filled an important function by providing support for migrant workers, including legal aid and medical care, especially for those in the informal sector.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law does not define “forced labor,” but the government used the definition found in International Labor Organization Convention 29. Under the law, destitute persons can be compelled to work.

The government enforced the law, although it was more likely to prosecute employers for less serious employment infringements than those of domestic servitude or bonded labor. Penalties included prison terms and fines, which were

usually sufficient to deter violations. The government took law enforcement action against employers for workplace violations, including for nonpayment of salaries, serious safety violations, and abuse or mistreatment of foreign domestic workers. It also investigated and imposed fines on some employment agencies for committing other illegal practices. The Ministry of Manpower reported, for example, that in March an employment agency lost its license and was fined S\$48,000 (\$34,800) for advertising 49 foreign domestic workers on an online marketplace in an undignified light, as if they were commodities. Given the number of low-paid foreign workers in the country, however, outside observers believe that many cases of abuse were undetected.

Practices indicative of forced labor, including the withholding of wages and passports, occurred. Migrant workers in low-wage and unskilled sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, and construction were vulnerable to labor exploitation.

The law caps the fees payable by foreign domestic workers to employment agencies in the country at one month's salary per year of the employment contract not to exceed two months' salary, irrespective of the duration of the contract. Observers noted that unscrupulous agencies in migrant workers' countries of origin could charge exorbitant fees.

Some observers also noted that the country's employer sponsorship system made legal migrant workers vulnerable to forced labor because there are limited circumstances in which they may change employers without the consent of their employer.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits all of the worst forms of child labor. The law prohibits employment of children younger than 13 years. A child age 13 or older may engage in light work in a nonindustrial undertaking, subject to medical clearance. Exceptions include work in family enterprises; a child 13 or older may only work in an industrial undertaking that employs members of his or her family. Ministry of Manpower regulations prohibit night employment of children and restrict industrial work for children between 15 and 16. Children younger than 15 may not work on commercial vessels, with moving machinery, on live electrical apparatus

lacking effective insulation, or in any underground job, and normally they are prohibited from employment in the industrial sector.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced these laws and regulations. Employers who violated laws related to child labor were subject to fines, imprisonment, or both, penalties that were sufficient to deter violations. Government officials asserted that child labor was not a significant problem.

The incidence of children in formal employment was low, although some children worked in family enterprises.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The constitution provides for equality in employment. No specific antidiscrimination legislation exists, although some statutes prohibit certain forms of discrimination. For example, employers may not dismiss female employees during pregnancy or maternity leave, and employers may not dismiss employees solely due to age, gender, race, religion, nationality, marital status, family responsibilities, disability, or medical condition.

The Ministry of Manpower's Fair Consideration Framework requires all companies to comply with the Tripartite Guidelines on Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices and have employment practices that are open, merit based, and nondiscriminatory. These guidelines call for eliminating language referring to age, race, gender, religion, marital status, family responsibilities, and disability in employment advertisements. Employers are required to provide explanations for putting requirements such as specific language skills in the job advertisement. Penalties for violation of government guidelines are at the discretion of the ministry. There were no similar government guidelines with respect to political opinion, sexual orientation, or HIV or other communicable disease status.

The Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices received complaints of employment discrimination, largely due to the preference to hire foreigners over citizens.

In January, President Halimah Yacob announced the formation of a Council for Board Diversity, which aims to increase the proportion of women on the boards of listed companies, public sector entities, nongovernmental organizations and charities. The council replaced a committee that focused on women's

representation on large listed companies. As of June the council reported that women's representation on boards of the largest 100 companies listed on the Singapore Exchange was 15.7 percent, while women filled 24.5 percent of positions on statutory boards, and 27.4 percent of those on registered nongovernment organizations and charities.

Some ethnic Malays and Indians reported that discrimination limited their employment and promotion opportunities. There were also some reports of discrimination based on disability, pregnancy, and sexual orientation or gender identity. Pregnancy is a breach of the standard work permit conditions for foreign workers, and the government cancels work permits and requires repatriation of foreign domestic workers who become pregnant.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law does not specify a national minimum wage for all sectors of the economy. The government has set minimum wages in the cleaning, landscaping, elevator maintenance, and security services sectors as a requirement to obtain a business license. The majority of these wages were below the unofficial poverty line determined by the National University of Singapore's Social Service Research Center.

The law sets the standard legal workweek at 44 hours, and requires employers to apply for an overtime exception from the Ministry of Manpower for employees to work more than 72 hours of overtime per month. Workplace protection including paid sick leave, mandatory annual leave, and protection against wrongful dismissal is available to all private sector employees, except domestic workers and seafarers who are covered under separate laws. The law also mandates benefits for part-time employees, defined as those working 35 hours or less.

The law establishes a framework for workplaces to comply with occupational safety and health standards, and regular inspections enforced the standards. Officials encouraged workers to report situations that endanger health or safety to the ministry, but the law does not specifically protect the right of workers to remove themselves from a hazardous working environment.

The Ministry of Manpower effectively enforced laws and regulations establishing working conditions and comprehensive occupational safety and health regulations. Penalties for violating these regulations--fines and stop-work orders--were sufficient to deter violations. The number of inspectors was sufficient to deter

violations. During the year, the ministry continued to promote training to reduce the frequency of job-related accidents in high-risk sectors such as construction, and authorities provided tax incentives to firms who introduced hazard control measures. Workplace fatalities in the first six months of the year were the lowest since 2006, when statistics first became publicly available. This continues a downward trend in the number of workplace fatalities, although the number of reported injuries has been relatively constant. The government also enforced requirements for employers to provide one rest day per week or compensation for foreign domestic workers.

In September, Ong Chin Chong, the sole proprietor of a transport firm, was fined S\$140,000 (\$102,000) for a fatal accident resulting from unsafe lifting operations that he supervised. Authorities found that Ong used unsafe equipment and had not provided training for the men on how to perform their roles. Authorities also issued a S\$60,000 (\$43,500) fine to Unipac, the firm for which Ong was a contractor, and a S\$160,000 (\$116,000) fine to Sunway, the occupier of the worksite, for failing to ensure that lifting operations were properly conducted on its premises. Ong's fine was the highest imposed on an individual prosecuted for unsafe working conditions, for which the maximum sentence is a S\$200,000 (\$145,000) fine, up to two years' imprisonment, or both.

In September parliament passed the Work Injury Compensation Act, which will take full effect in September 2020. The new law incentivizes companies to prevent workplace injuries by permitting employers with better safety records to pay lower premiums, expedites the benefit claim process for workers, and increases the size of benefit payouts to injured workers.

The Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management, which includes the Ministry of Manpower, unions, and the employers' federation, offers advice and mediation services to help employees and employers to manage employment disputes. The Labor Relations and Workplaces Division of the Ministry of Manpower provided free advisory services to both foreign and local workers who experienced problems with employers; it provided mediation services for a fee. The ministry operated a hotline for foreign domestic workers.

The majority of foreign workers were concentrated in low-wage, low-skill jobs and were often required to work long hours in construction, shipbuilding, services, and domestic work.

The majority of foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, worked under clearly outlined contracts. Any employer of a foreign domestic worker or a member of the employer's family, if convicted of certain offenses against the worker, such as causing hurt or insulting the modesty of the worker, is liable to a maximum penalty of one and one-half times the mandated penalty when the victim is not a domestic worker. Nevertheless, there were reports of employers abusing or mistreating such workers (see section 7.b.).